United Nations A/CN.10/PV.274

General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

274th meeting

Monday, 17 April 2006, 3 p.m.

New York

Chairman: Mr. Oh Joon ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Election of officers

The Chairman: As members are aware, at our last meeting I nominated Mr. Jean-Francis Zinsou of Benin for the chairmanship of Working Group I. In that regard, I am happy to report to the Commission that, since our meeting last Thursday, I have heard no differing opinion on that nomination. Therefore, I would like to propose that we elect Mr. Zinsou as Chairman of Working Group I. May I take it that the Commission decides to elect Mr. Jean-Francis Zinsou of Benin as Chairman of Working Group I?

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I congratulate Mr. Jean-Francis Zinsou on his election and wish him good luck and productive work in his new, important assignment.

Organization of work

The Chairman: We made a good start last Thursday on today's agenda item. We now have before us a conference room paper on the issue from the Non-Aligned Movement, and we have heard statements by a number of delegations on this matter.

As I stated at our previous meetings, I also intend to form a group of friends of the chair with respect to the third issue related to the measures for improving the effectiveness of the Commission's methods of work. The friends of the chair will be assisting me in guiding the discussions, and probably will help also to draft a non-paper on the methods of work.

I am happy to inform the Commission that one of the friends of the chair will be a person well-known to all representatives, Ambassador Sylvester Rowe of Sierra Leone, who kindly agreed to help me in that regard.

I am still searching for the other person to be included in the friends of the chair and will let representatives know his or her name in due course.

Finally, on organizational matters, I would like to bring members' attention to a revised programme of work contained in document A/CN.10/2006/CRP.1/Rev.1. The programme was adjusted to reflect the current scheduled work of the Commission for the remaining two weeks. I understand that the document was circulated last Thursday, but if anyone does not have a copy, it is available from the conference officers at the back of the conference room.

Are there are any comments on the revised programme of work?

I understand that no one wishes to comment on the revised programme of work. If I hear no objection, may I take it that the Commission takes note of the revised programme of work?

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I shall now open the floor for further comments, observations and proposals under

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

06-32299 (E)

the issue of measures for improving the effectiveness of the Commission's methods of work.

Before doing so, let me share with the Commission my plans concerning the item we are discussing. We now have at least one friend of the Chairman, Ambassador Sylvester Rowe, who will chair our next meeting, on Wednesday, on this same issue. It will be an informal plenary meeting, with no record. I will prepare, with the help of the Secretariat, a draft summary of last Thursday's and today's discussions. We will circulate the draft summary by Wednesday morning, and it will serve as a basis for our informal discussions, to be held on Wednesday afternoon and which will be chaired by Ambassador Sylvester Rowe.

Does any representative wish to comment on this plan?

If not, I shall open the floor for discussions in continuation of the debate held last Thursday on this issue.

Mr. Rachkov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The statement made by the Ambassador of Sierra Leone on Thursday was a very important one. However, I should like to know precisely what aspects of the methods of work of the Disarmament Commission are not agreeable to delegations? What is it that is having a negative impact on the results of our work, and what, therefore, requires reform?

My delegation believes that the intensity and the nature of the work done this year by the Disarmament Commission on enhancing its methods of work clearly show that, in and of themselves, the methods of work are, on the whole, acceptable. They are not an obstacle to achieving productive results in the Commission. Moreover, I should like to emphasize that previous decisions taken by the General Assembly, such as decision 52/492, which is aimed at enhancing the efficient functioning of the Commission — not its methods of work — are well-thought-out decisions that give some leeway for manoeuvring. Some of the questions raised during previous meetings were, in fact, resolved in that decision. The amount of time devoted to discussing specific questions could be changed, if necessary, on the basis of a consensus decision taken by the Commission.

Decision 52/492 also contains language which urges the early election of the Chairpersons of the working groups at the fall session so that they can hold preliminary consultations. At previous meetings, we discussed the use of the consensus rule in adopting decisions. Would that enhance the Commission's productiveness?

I would note here that, given the fact that there is universal participation in this disarmament body, only the principle of consensus can be acceptable in this forum. As was quite rightly noted on Thursday by the representative of the Russian Federation, some problems exist with regard to the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission adopted at its previous sessions.

In our view, departing from the principle of consensus on such recommendations makes it even less likely that they will actually be implemented. With regard to enhancing the cooperation between the Disarmament Commission, the Conference on Disarmament and the First Committee, my delegation is prepared to discuss specific proposals if the opportunity arises.

Ms. Freedman (United Kingdom): First of all, I would like to stress that I associate myself with the statement delivered by the Austrian representative on 13 April on behalf of the European Union (EU). As stated by the presidency of the European Union, the United Kingdom also confirms that it continues to regard the Disarmament Commission as a vital element of the wider United Nations disarmament machinery.

The United Kingdom welcomes the general exchange of views to date on the issue of improving the methods of work of the Commission. In that regard, we welcome the contributions made to date by a wide number of delegations, as well as the interventions made by the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs. We hope also to have substantive proposals to put forward at a future date as part of a coordinated EU position.

The United Kingdom feels strong sympathy with the approach presented by the delegation of Sierra Leone last Thursday on identifying questions before coming up with the answers that would help the Commission deliver on its objectives. We agree that reform should be a means to an end and not an end in itself.

On 13 April, questions were raised regarding the length of the cycle and the modality of the meetings of the Disarmament Commission. The United Kingdom

does not have a fixed position on these issues other than the fact that we want a more efficient Commission. We believe that there might be merit in hearing colleagues' views on, for instance, whether a one-year Disarmament Commission would achieve better or worse results than the current three-year format, or whether a Disarmament Commission that met more frequently might be better placed to agree on recommendations than the current format.

Mr. Chairman, we welcome the idea of an informal session on Wednesday afternoon, as you suggested. More generally, we would also be interested in hearing the Chairman's opinion on what he views as the outcome of our deliberations on this particular issue. It strikes us that we might be able to reach rapid agreement on a number of issues, for example, the commitment of Member States to the Disarmament Commission's playing a vital role within the wider United Nations disarmament machinery; the need for greater dialogue between the chairpersons of the Conference on Disarmament, the Disarmament Commission and the First Committee; and the need for the Chairperson and the Bureau to be appointed early, possible at the time of the session of the First Committee, in order to facilitate the Commission's work.

We hope that the final document will also reflect other practical measures that will make a difference to our work as well as those areas that might require further work sometime in the future.

Mr. Rachmianto (Indonesia): Allow me to make some further comments on the issue of working methods.

As a follow-up to resolution 52/12 B of 1997, the Disarmament Commission undertook a review towards rationalizing and streamlining its methods of work. As the result of that review, a number of recommendations were put forward by the Commission to the General Assembly. Those recommendations were finally adopted as decision 52/492. In fact, that decision has been applied only once, during the 2000-2003 cycle. As we meet here today, the Commission is starting for only the second time to implement all the provisions of decision 52/492. Therefore, in my view, it is rather too early to decide whether the provisions of that decision are already obsolete or have been overtaken by current developments.

I share the view expressed early in our discussion by the representative of Sierra Leone, who asked what was wrong with the working methods of the Commission. Perhaps I should ask a follow-up question: how can we improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Commission if we keep changing our mandate or the guidelines of our work? I believe that, as some delegations have stated, our problems are not actually related to the methods of work of the Commission. For example, on Thursday, one delegation proposed that the Commission deal with only one agenda item instead of two, and others suggested that the period of three years might be too long to consider the agenda items.

If we look at the past, we will find that the Commission had been dealing with three agenda items, plus one issue involving the working methods. But in the end, the Commission managed to come up with very good recommendations, for example the 1999 guidelines on nuclear-weapon-free zones and the outcome on conventional arms control. That proves that the question is not related to the number of agenda items we have or the duration of our consideration of the items.

Perhaps, as the representative of Belarus stated earlier, we should look more closely at decision 52/492. In particular, in points (b) and (c) it is clearly stated that it is possible for the Commission to have more than two agenda items and even to consider other options for the duration of its deliberations, as long as they are decided by consensus.

With regard to the proposal to have early elections for the Bureau, including for the Chairs of the working groups, point (e) of decision 52/492 envisaged such a possibility. Therefore, my delegation can support the proposal in the hope that, if it can be implemented, we could also carry out the idea of having working papers circulated in advance.

Concerning the rules of procedure — particularly with regard to the Commission's decision-making process — the Final Document of the tenth special session of the General Assembly (S-10/2) clearly stated, in paragraph 118 (b), that the Commission "shall make every effort to ensure that, in so far as possible" — I would like to underline "insofar as possible" — "decisions on substantive issues be adopted by consensus". That procedure was, in fact, confirmed by decision 52/492.

However, we have to recognize that the Commission is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly. Therefore, in my view, in certain circumstances it is not necessary that the decisions of the Commission be taken on the basis of consensus. In other words, in such cases, the General Assembly's rules of procedure may be applied to the work of the Commission.

With regard to the proposal to encourage dialogue among the disarmament mechanisms, we have no difficulty supporting it. In fact, in 1998, the Chairman of the Disarmament Commission underlined that there was a need for a complementarity of efforts among those mechanisms — the First Committee, the Conference on Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission — to consider substantive issues. Unfortunately, however, since that time, one of the mechanisms, the Conference on Disarmament, has not done any substantive work; this year will mark the tenth anniversary of its stalemate. So I do not know; perhaps the idea of promoting such dialogue among the mechanisms is premature.

The last point I would like to make is that, on the basis of what was stated by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union on Thursday, we look forward to and are open to hearing what kinds of practical and pragmatic proposals that the Union will submit to the Commission for our consideration. I would also like to welcome your proposal, Mr. Chairman, to have informal consultations on Wednesday. We are ready to work on the basis of the paper that you are going to circulate on that issue.

Mr. Choi Hong-ghi (Republic of Korea): My delegation also welcomes this opportunity to deliberate on measures for improving the effectiveness of the working methods of the Disarmament Commission. As we pointed out during the general exchange of views last Tuesday, achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness is a matter not of choice, but of necessity.

New challenges have made inevitable the recent reform efforts throughout the United Nations. The Disarmament Commission is no exception. This is not the first time that we have deliberated the issue of Commission reform. At the 1990 substantive session, reform was also discussed, while in 1998 the General Assembly adopted its decision 52/492 on this topic. The principles of that decision are being applied at the current session. Nevertheless, in this time of reform, there is still something that can be done to improve the working methods of the Disarmament Commission and to put new ideas into practice. My delegation would like to make several comments and suggestions that we believe could be helpful with regard to improving the working methods of the Disarmament Commission.

First of all, my delegation shares the view that this examination of the working methods of the Disarmament Commission should be carried out with a view to reaffirming the importance of the Commission and strengthening its mandate as the only body in the United Nations system for in-depth deliberation on disarmament issues that has universal membership. Furthermore, we believe that the current principle of deciding substantive issues by consensus should be maintained.

As previous speakers have stated, in decision 52/492 the General Assembly urged the regional groups to make possible the early election of the Chairs of the subsidiary bodies, preferably at the organizational session of the Commission in the autumn. We believe that the Chairs of the Commission and of its subsidiary bodies should be elected as early as possible — at least three months before the substantive session starts — so that they have enough time to prepare adequately for their responsibilities. Early elections would also enable member States to be better prepared for the deliberations and would provide time for intensive informal pre-sessions at which major differences could be ironed out, facilitating more in-depth debate and increasing the effectiveness of the formal meetings.

Regarding the three-year cycle of deliberations, we agree with the previous speaker that it might be worthwhile to explore whether the current system of three-year cycles is the most effective way to conduct the work of the Commission. If all goes smoothly, the three-year cycle allows member States to deliberate in great depth on specific agenda items, but working according to this extended cycle risks a loss of focus and intensity, especially during the first two years of the cycle. Furthermore, the strenuous efforts of member States over three years might come to naught if the Commission fails to agree on a substantive document at the end of the third-year session, as happened during the last three-year cycle.

One possible approach to dealing with these concerns would be to engage in deliberations on a one-

year basis with the possibility of a one-year extension if necessary. For that purpose we might also consider more specific and focused issues for each year. To avoid annual delays and difficulties in formulating agendas, we could decide on agendas for two or three years into the future. Furthermore, as my delegation pointed out during the general exchange of views, we must be cautious not to allow our lack of progress on one issue to be an excuse for inaction in other areas. My delegation believes that this approach would encourage focused and intensive deliberations. If the Chairs are elected well enough in advance, they could use pre-session consultations to further increase the effectiveness of the one-year deliberation cycle.

Regarding Under-Secretary-General Tanaka's recommendation that experts on specific disarmament issues be invited to plenary meetings, we agree that this could be of benefit and believe that it could be useful to engage such experts in active dialogue.

Finally, although this is not exactly a matter of our working methods, my delegation would like to suggest that the Disarmament Commission website be improved. The current website is largely lacking in useful information. My delegation requests that the Secretariat study ways to improve the Commission website.

Mr. Minami (Japan): I would like to make some remarks on the issues which were raised in plenary meetings last week and today with regard to measures for improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the Disarmament Commission.

Generally speaking, the cycle of operation and the duration of deliberations each year should be considered taking into account the role and the mandate given to the Disarmament Commission. Japan firmly believes that the current role given to the Commission is extremely important in the field of disarmament and that the mandate should be maintained. On the other hand, taking into consideration the international security environment, which is constantly changing, it might not be very appropriate for us to discuss the same issue for three years. That might not respond appropriately and in a timely manner to the urgent need for international peace and security.

I believe therefore that the idea of one-year deliberations on one appropriate agenda item might deserve due consideration. In that case, three weeks of deliberations each year, as now provided for, would be necessary for the production of recommendations or guidelines at the end of such deliberations. Needless to say, the early election of a Chairman and the formation of the Bureau, as well as the circulation well in advance of the Chairman's non-paper on the item, would be necessary.

Concerning the balance between agenda items, I consider that this can be maintained if each item is, in principle, discussed every two years. In that way, recommendations or guidelines for each agenda item could be produced every two years, which would make it possible for the Disarmament Commission to better respond to the needs of the international community.

That is just a suggestion to be considered in future discussions. Japan is open to any proposal that will contribute to the effectiveness of the methods of work of the Commission. In any case, Japan would like to draw the attention of all delegations to the fact that, when we consider the effectiveness of the methods of work, the financial aspects should be duly considered.

Finally, I would like to point out that Japan attaches great importance to consensus decisions in the disarmament machinery, including, of course, this body.

Mr. Bravaco (United States of America): I just wanted to put on the record a few thoughts about some of the possible ways forward in terms of measures. One thing I think the United States would like very much to see is for the Disarmament Commission to reaffirm the principle of consensus in its deliberations. We are all mindful of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly but, as we all know, the Disarmament Commission deals with international security matters and other matters that cut to the heart of the national security of all of us. In that context, what the rules say on paper is one thing, and what is important for us to embrace as a practical matter and as a political matter is something else again. So, I think that embracing the importance of consensus in our work is something that we should focus on.

In that context, I think that to prevent a recurrence of the experience we had in 2002, where the Disarmament Commission did not meet — and I do not believe that that decision was taken on the basis of consensus — we should reaffirm the importance of the Commission meeting unless the membership takes a formal decision to adjourn.

On the issue of the work cycle and how many issues the Commission should focus on, I think we should explore the concept of the Disarmament Commission perhaps looking at only one issue at a time under a renewable one-year mandate to ensure that a given topic can benefit from an in-depth review by all United Nations Member States. This year, as we saw up until last Thursday, there seemed to be a little bit of a problem with the idea of Commission member States committing the resources necessary for a three-year examination of issues in the nuclear Working Group. So, I think we should look at trying to make consideration of issues, and chairmanships of working groups, open to all Governments — all member States, large and small — not just those Governments that have the manpower necessary to commit to a three-year chairmanship. And perhaps one way to do that is to look at very focused discussions on one issue at a time. If the Commission decides that a particular issue needs more than one year's examination, then so be it; we can roll it over into the following year. But if we can look at something in a year and come up with recommendations in three weeks, then something should not be dragged along because of a fixed three-week issue cycle session, without necessarily having much to talk about for nine weeks spread over a three-year period. I think we should not necessarily throw that off the table right off the bat.

On the issue of early elections, I think that approach is very wise. On the idea of not linking progress in one working group to progress in another: if we had only one working group that would, of course, take care of that issue.

Then, on the representative of the Republic of Korea's idea of improving the Disarmament Commission's website, I think that is a very good idea. The last time I looked, the information there was a little bit outdated, so I think the Department for Disarmament Affairs could take a look at that.

I just wanted to put some of those preliminary thoughts from the United States perspective on the table.

The Chairman: For the benefit of those representatives who arrived after I made the announcement about our future work, I will recall my earlier comments. I will prepare, with the help of the Secretariat, a draft summary of our discussions in the two meetings on this item, which will be circulated to members before the beginning of our next plenary meeting on Wednesday afternoon. That meeting will take the form of an informal plenary, chaired by my friend Ambassador Sylvester Rowe.

If any representatives wish to present statements or express views on this issue in written form, they would be welcome. Indeed, that would help the Secretariat in its effort to sum up our discussions.

Next week will be our last week, so hopefully each of our two Working Groups will be able to prepare a working paper. I hope that we will also have a working paper after Wednesday afternoon's informal meeting on working methods.

Mr. Aboul Atta (Egypt): I have listened attentively to the brief discussion that we have had so far this afternoon with regard to methods of work. Several proposals and ideas are floating around with regard to the number of agenda items, the cycle, the modalities and the financial implications. But one question that was asked in our previous meeting has not yet been answered. What is wrong with the current methods of work? What is it that is not functioning correctly?

The representative of the United Kingdom suggested that we might look at a couple of issues: the length of the cycle and the modalities of the meetings. But we fail to see the logic in the argument that there is something wrong with the length of the current cycle, especially in view of the comments of the representative of Indonesia. Indeed, our current methods of work have been put into practice only once. Does one application of the methods of work provide sufficient lessons for us as we look at changing or revitalizing those methods?

Let us also be clear about something else: the fact that we had no substantive meetings after 2003 was not due to our methods of work. All delegations are quite clear about that and know exactly where the problem lay. The problem lay in our inability to agree on substantive agenda items. It was not the result of a deficiency in the methods of work.

Furthermore, with regard to the financial implications, how would such implications relate to meetings being held in cycles of three years, two years or one year? Or do we want to have sessions once every three years? That, of course, would be a different story. But if this is what we want to achieve, maybe we

should look at cutting expenses in other areas that are not functioning — not functioning at all.

This brings me back to your comment, Mr. Chairman, that you intend to prepare a summary of our discussions. How would that serve our discussion here if it merely recaps what is said at today's meeting and last Thursday? There is a fundamental question that remains unanswered: what is the objective and purpose of the exercise?

So perhaps before engaging in the exercise, we should hold further discussions on this matter. We believe that the idea that you, Sir, proposed of having an informal plenary meeting to discuss this issue could be a useful exercise.

The Chairman: The question raised by the representative of Egypt has been raised by other delegations, too. What is wrong with the current methods of work of the Disarmament Commission? I do not know whether representatives who have spoken so far have tried to answer that question directly. However, many delegations have come up with ideas and proposals for improving the working methods of the Commission. In my opinion, that seems to indicate that there is room for improvement in the working methods of the Commission. I do not know whether there is anything wrong with the working methods of the Commission, but those comments seem to indicate that there is room for improvement. I think that there is room for improvement in anything. We need to utilize the comments, views and suggestions made by delegations during the two meetings. My draft summary of those comments and proposals will serve as a basis for an in-depth discussion, if possible, on Wednesday afternoon, in an informal setting. Whether or not we will be able to work out a final product as a result of the two meetings we have had will also depend on delegates themselves.

We will see how we can sum up all these efforts. Hopefully, my draft summary will help members as they try to agree on an outcome of our discussion. If many representatives believe that there is nothing wrong with our current working methods and there is not much improvement we can make, so be it. Otherwise, there will be a change, with new working methods for the Commission. If there are many members who wish that, then we will make a decision and we will go on. I think that is how I would approach this issue.

Mr. Despax (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like, Mr. Chairman, to lend you my support regarding the methodology you have outlined. I think that it is a stage-by-stage process and I think it is a good idea that we should have a summary of all of the ideas expressed. There are quite a few of them, after all, after two half days of discussion about how to improve our working methods.

It is not a question of whether there are problems in the Disarmament Commission. The point is to listen to what people say. Through their statements, we see that there are a number of practical, concrete ideas, in order better to fulfil the mandate entrusted to us and to make the Commission more effective. So I think, Sir, that your initial summary will be a useful working tool, at least for my delegation.

I would like to seek clarification from you, Sir. You also mentioned a draft non-paper. My understanding of this draft non-paper that will be drafted by the Friends of the Chair will come at a second stage. I am asking you this for the following reason: the European Union (EU) is in a process of formulating proposals, and identifying open questions about this subject. Perhaps by Wednesday afternoon we might be in a position to share our thinking about this. I think these ideas could then be useful to the Friends of the Chair in drafting their summary. What I clearly want to avoid is that in the draft summary you are putting together for Wednesday you do not just have the general ideas that the Austrian EU presidency presented last Thursday, but we do not yet have specific proposals. These will doubtless follow the debate on Wednesday afternoon. So I just want to have some clarification that the non-paper produced by the Friends of the Chair will be published at a later stage, either on Thursday or at the beginning of next week. I would be grateful for some clarification.

The Chairman: Regarding the question of the representative of France, I think I should be using the term conference room paper, rather than non-paper. I think in this Commission we tend to refer to either "conference room paper" or "working paper". The difference is that a working paper is translated into all official languages and a conference room paper is more like a non-paper. That is probably why I used the term non-paper. We will be using the term "conference room paper", and my summary will probably be a conference room paper. Then, based on that, at the informal meeting on Wednesday, we will aim at producing a

working paper or a conference room paper that will later become our final product.

Ms. Majali (Jordan): Of course, my delegation, like the Chair and like other delegations, believes that there is always room for improvement, but if something is functioning well, why tamper with it? When we tamper with something we sometimes risk breaking something that is intact. But then again, we are willing to listen to all delegations in this regard. Of course, as Chairperson, it is your prerogative to present us with any paper, but after listening to all delegations here, we consider that whatever summary is put forward will have to take into consideration that there were delegations that believed that the modalities of work are fine. There were others who suggested that perhaps there is room for change and gave specific proposals in that regard, and there were other members who were quite reluctant to bring about changes.

When we deal with revitalization or when we discuss this very important issue, on what are we going to base our assessment? Why do we need to improve these methods of work? Do they need to be improved? Is that really a way to improve our work, or will it be more of a stumbling block? Or is it only a matter of preference? If there is a preference to have one agenda item rather than two, we would be forgetting about balance, and, here, balance is very important.

There are many issues that need to be taken into consideration when the summary is presented. Is there perhaps a scientific method of assessing the work of the Disarmament Commission, especially bearing in mind what was said by a few delegations here, that we do not really have a long history and that the working methods have only been applied one time since 2000? We do not really have a great deal of history. It is really going to be more of a discussion, rather than coming up with something concrete. Therefore it might be more prudent to make sure that, since we have indeed been able to start our Disarmament Commission meetings after three years, we not risk stalling any future positive developments in this regard.

Mr. Rowe (Sierra Leone): Mine was a rhetorical question last week when I raised the question of what is wrong with the working methods of the Commission and what were the weaknesses of the Commission. But based on the discussions we have had so far, last week and today, it appears that many delegations believe that we should look at the working methods, that perhaps we need not make a lengthy list of what is wrong with the Commission. When we worked on the revitalization of the First Committee, delegations, inter alia, were saying that maybe some of the resolutions were too long. But, in spite of the fact that we did not have a long list of what was wrong with the First Committee, we were able to come up with something.

Based, as I said, on the discussions we have had so far, there may not be any drastic changes, but at least there will be something on which we can all agree in order to improve matters — as much as possible. In other words, we are not going to reinvent the wheel, but I hope we will be able to come up with something enabling us to say that we have done something. We can make some improvements here and there, taking into consideration those aspects that need not be changed or improved.

One issue raised by a number of delegations so far, including the Japanese delegation — and I think Mr. Tanaka also mentioned it last week — is that we are facing new developments in a greatly changing international situation. The approach may be working at this time, but we have to take the situation into consideration, and not necessarily change the approach, but at least perhaps make some adjustments to it.

I have another issue which does not necessarily relate to the issue we are discussing now, concerning our proposal about the United Nations Disarmament Decade. I should like to raise that issue after we have finished discussing the Chairman's plan.

The Chairman: Let me clarify one matter. We are considering this issue because it is included in our agenda based on an agreement reached among members last year. It was not the Chair who introduced this item for discussion; it was the members themselves who agreed to discuss the issue at this time. So if anyone is asking why we are looking at it, we are looking at it because we agreed to do so.

Mr. Hashmi (Pakistan): My delegation too has listened very carefully to the exchange of views that has taken place today and when we last met. I think that the delegations of Indonesia and Egypt have raised very important points. My delegation too is quite open to considering the ideas that have been put forward, such as the early election of the Chairman and the Chairs of the subsidiary bodies, dialogue among the Chairs of the various elements of the multilateral disarmament machinery, and advance presentation of

working papers. Those are all ideas that can certainly be looked into. But, as the delegations of Indonesia and Egypt stated, some of those ideas are not new, but they have been applied only once. That factor has to be kept in perspective as we continue with this exchange of views.

My delegation also would like to associate itself with the remarks made by our Egyptian colleague to the effect that the methods of work of the Commission are working. My delegation feels that they are the same methods of work that contributed to the production of agreed guidelines and recommendations at a couple of previous sessions of the Disarmament Commission. So we also hold the view that there is nothing wrong with the existing methods of work. But at the same time, as the Chairman has said, there is always room for improvement. We will approach the issue in that same spirit: we are prepared to explore ideas and listen to proposals that will contribute to improving the working methods of the Commission.

Mr. Aboul Atta (Egypt): With regard to the issue of working methods, I would like to follow up on a question that was raised by the representative of France with regard to the non-paper — or as the Chairman later said, the conference room paper. Since we are discussing improvement of the working methods of the Disarmament Commission, is it correct that we are talking about three papers, whether we call them conference room papers or non-papers? One is the Chairman's summary; the second is a compilation of proposals in a conference room paper; and the third is a conference room paper by the friends of the Chairman — a third paper that will come after our plenary meeting on Wednesday. It seems odd that we should have three different papers when we are talking about improving our methods of work.

Returning to the issue of our methods of work, I agree fully with everything you have said, Mr. Chairman. Indeed, it was the member States that agreed to include this item for discussion during the 2006 substantive session, based upon the request of our dear colleague the representative of the United States. Thus, we would have expected — since we are talking about efficiency and improving the working methods of the Disarmament Commission — to see some proposals at this early stage of our work. This is the second meeting dedicated to discussion of this issue. So far, we have only listened to general observations, remarks or proposals, but we have not seen anything concrete on which we can work with greater speed that at present. Maybe we should start working on that.

I am still not sure how the three documents fit together, so I would seek some clarification, if possible.

The Chairman: By way of clarification, I would recall that at the beginning of the present session I told members that, down the road, we would like to have two documents for each agenda item: one working paper and one compilation of our discussion. I think that for Working Groups I and II, the working papers will be by way of an outline for the final document we are going to have in two years' time. I think that those four documents will eventually be combined into two in the context of the Commission as a whole: we will have one working paper and one compilation. Thus, for each agenda item we will be working essentially with two papers.

For the issue before us, the Chair's draft summary, which will come out on Wednesday, will just have the purpose of helping us in our informal consultations through next week. Of course, it will be a summary only of the two meetings we have had so far. It will not be proposed as the final compilation document; it will only have the purpose of helping us in our discussion on Wednesday.

Mr. Bravaco (United States of America): I just wanted to make a few points about how we all got to where we are on this issue, and to remind my friend the representative of Egypt that last year this was a United States-suggested process, but that we in this delegation certainly never meant it to be a United States-led process.

In fact, the European Union very quickly agreed that this was a discussion the Disarmament Commission should have. And, as I recall quite vividly, it was the Indonesian delegation that suggested using the word "measures" in our mandate, in other words bringing the idea of actually having a discussion that led to something concrete. So, it was an Indonesian idea that we should discuss the notion of embracing measures at the end of this process. And I think that is exactly where we should be: a very broad and deep discussion, with proposals coming from as many delegations as possible, and not led or pushed by any particular delegation. That is the democratic way.

Mr. Danesh-Yazdi (Islamic Republic of Iran): My delegation has already clarified its position on this issue, but listening carefully to the discussion we have had today I am obliged to repeat some of the points my delegation had already made.

First of all, what we agreed upon in the Commission was to consider this issue. There is no request for any kind of action by us. It is possible for us to take action, but our mandate does not say that the Disarmament Commission should as a matter of certainty make recommendations. If we find that our methods of work are working and when we come to the point of an outcome, certainly at the end we should confirm what we already have. Thus far, in all the discussion and in all the positions that have been stated, we have not heard anybody pinpoint the problems with the present methods of work. The main view that delegations put forward was that, as stated by the Non-Aligned Movement, the main difficulty comes from the lack of political will, not from the issue of the methods of work. As the representative of Indonesia said at today's meeting, the existing methods of work have been implemented only once, from 2000 to 2003. I myself stated at the previous meeting that the result was near-consensus on one issue and a thorough discussion of the other. It is in the nature of the international disarmament forums that some on issues one will not reach consensus. This state of affairs comes about because we have the principle of consensus. Hence, if there is a possibility of discovering areas for change, note that it is the principle of consensus that prevented the previous substantive session of the Disarmament Commission to reach agreement on one of the important issues before it.

My final point relates to the items on the agenda of the Disarmament Commission. Over a period of some years, the Commission reduced the number of its substantive agenda items from four to two, with the possibility of discussing a third issue. That reflected the wisdom of the Disarmament Commission with a view to keeping a balance between the conventional weapons issue and the issue of nuclear disarmament. It was the result of long and painstaking negotiations. We cannot jump to conclusions. Just because it was applied once and did not result in a satisfactory outcome, we should not necessarily change something that had been decided upon as the result of a long process. We should exercise caution here.

We want to reaffirm that, as stated by the Non-Aligned Movement, the provisions of consensus decision 52/492 remain valid. At the same time, as my delegation has already noted, we are open to discussion on some aspects of the work of the Commission — organizational and technical aspects — and to discovering whether there are possibilities for improving our work.

I think it would be premature to change the whole nature of the Disarmament Commission — something which is the result of so many years of practice.

The Chairman: I can assure members that the Secretariat will do its best to make the Chair's draft summary of our two meetings as balanced as possible. All the views and comments expressed on the floor will be included, including the views of those who do not see the need for this discussion. All views will thus be duly reflected in the summary.

Mr. Aboul Atta (Egypt): I would like to ask your indulgence, Mr. Chairman, and to request you to include in the summary a basic question to which we might try to find an answer in our informal consultations on Wednesday — without any implication of an objection to improving our working methods. Where does the problem lie with the current working methods? That is the basic question we should look at.

Mr. Rowe (Sierra Leone): Let me make one comment before I turn to the question of the Disarmament Decade. Maybe I should not say anything yet, Mr. Chairman, since you have asked me to assist you in the preparation of the paper, and since I have consented. But, as I said earlier, we do not want to start making a list of what is wrong. I raised the question earlier, as I said, it was a rhetorical question, intended to start us thinking. The intention was not necessarily for us to have a catalogue of what is wrong with the Commission. Also as I said earlier, we already have a feeling — as indicated by some of what the representative of Iran said — that maybe there are certain changes that could be made here and there.

Hence, in my view, the paper should not necessarily include what is wrong with the Commission. Some people have said that they feel that decision 52/492 is valid. Others have put forward new ideas; for instance, I think the representative of Iran mentioned last Thursday that members should provide their working papers in advance. There are new ideas,

and I hope that the Chair's paper will reflect some of those ideas.

We look forward to seeing the European Union (EU) proposal in writing, which I think will help the Chairman, and all of us, a lot. I am not sure of the time frame, but I hope that down the road the Chairman will come up with something — whether a conference room paper or a working paper — that will provide a basis for how the Commission will express itself to the Assembly, saying that it had discussed this issue and this is what it had come up with.

I have not yet taken up my position, but I would like informally to suggest that, when the EU or other delegations submit written suggestions or ideas — I think the Chairman referred to this; I was out of the room at the time — they should be specific. If there are new ideas, it would help us all in this process if they were written down.

The Chairman: I would like to assure the Commission that Ambassador Rowe said exactly what I meant to say. We will include all views, including those supporting the current working methods.

Perhaps Ambassador Rowe would now like to talk about the Disarmament Decade.

Mr. Rowe (Sierra Leone): I raised the issue of the United Nations Disarmament Decade last week in the context of our discussion of working methods. Some delegations may feel that that issue does not fall within the ambit of working methods, but I see it in the context of improving the efficient functioning of the Commission. I mentioned the fact that the Commission was given a mandate by the General Assembly, at least for the Third Disarmament Decade.

Should we consider it as a procedural issue or as a substantive issue? As I said, we have not made a formal request, but I think that that might be an idea. I do not know whether we should discuss the issue or hear the views of other delegations in the context of our review of working methods, under another agenda item or as a separate issue, at least at the preliminary stage. My delegation would like to hear views on this.

The Chairman: I will discuss the question raised by Ambassador Rowe with the Secretariat and the Bureau with a view to finding out how to deal with it and whether we are supposed to deal with it here.

Mr. Rachmianto (Indonesia): I would like to comment on the proposal made by the representative of Sierra Leone regarding the issue of the Disarmament Decade. I recall that a similar proposal about the Disarmament Decade was made by the Group of 21 quite a long time ago — in 1996, if I am not mistaken — in the Conference on Disarmament. As the issue is closely related to substantive matters, perhaps we could discuss it in Working Group I. That is just a suggestion.

The Chairman: As I said, I will discuss the issue with the Secretariat and with the Bureau, and we will decide on proper forum in which to deal with it.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.